



From Awareness to Action

BRIEF

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Inclusive Family Justice in Rural, Remote and Northern British Columbia



At Simon Fraser University, we live and work on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples of the x^wməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətał (Tsleil' -Waututh) Nations.

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TRANSLATION

MCIS Language Solutions 789 Don Mills Rd, Suite 1010, Toronto, ON M3C 1T5
T: 416-467-3097 ext. 749 | 1-888-990-9014

DESIGN

Sarah Cordell, Multimedia Coordinator at the Faculty of Education at Western University

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Inclusive Family Justice in Rural, Remote and Northern British Columbia

INTRODUCTION

This Learning Brief is the result of a collaboration between Northern FIRE (Feminist Institute for Research and Evaluation), the FRED Centre (Feminist Research, Education, Development and Action), and Rise Women's Legal Centre. The research done by Northern FIRE lends a deeper context to the recommendations developed from Rise's recent research about creating more accessible family justice. This brief has also provided the opportunity to amplify existing calls to action relating to family violence, marginalized groups, access to services, and finding justice in our current legal system. While legal representation is essential for individuals fleeing abuse it is often not an option either due to the high cost or not being able to find a family lawyer, particularly in rural, remote, and northern areas of BC. The research that is referenced in this brief deliberately focuses on practical approaches to address the barriers clients face when navigating family law matters. Some solutions involve immediate action at the community level while others require systemic restructuring and longer implementation timelines. The recommendations aim to increase accessibility to family court and to improve the emotional and physical safety of survivors.

THE RURAL, REMOTE AND NORTHERN CONTEXT

The majority of British Columbia's land mass can be considered rural, remote, and/or northern (RRN). These terms are controversial and difficult to define precisely. "Rural" has often been based on community size, with communities from 10 to 30 thousand inhabitants (depending on studies) characterized as rural. "Remote" is defined through distance from larger centres and/or accessibility by road. "Northern" is defined differently in different provinces but often does not refer to a strict geographic definition. For example, British Columbia's Northern Health Region is often described as serving "the northern half" of BC, but the region includes roughly the northern two-thirds of the province, from south of Quesnel to the Yukon border. RRN communities generally share a combination of challenging geography, harsher climate, low population density, and reduced access to infrastructure and services. What it means to be "RRN" also often includes social, economic, and cultural differences from the communities of urban southern BC (Pitblado, 2005; Nonomura & Baker, 2021; Conroy, 2021).

Urban British Columbians are sometimes unaware that even the smallest and most remote RRN communities struggle with the same challenges of homelessness, mental health, violence, precarity, and addiction seen in southern cities. In some case, RRN communities experience higher rates of such problems. However, because services and government are centralized in southwestern British Columbia, RRN communities often lack access to necessary services to address social challenges. In addition, because RRN communities experience higher rates of family and gender-based violence (GBV), service gaps are particularly acute in this area (Nonomura & Baker). All the above factors affect both family violence and access to legal services in rural, remote, and northern British Columbia, producing unique risk factors and service barriers. It is estimated that about 25% of British Columbians live in RRN communities; therefore,

RISK FACTORS FOR FAMILY VIOLENCE

Unique risk factors characterize RRN communities in a period of apparently increasing family violence. From 2018 to 2023, family violence increased overall in Canada, registering the highest recorded levels for violence against children and seniors. Data suggest clear urban-rural and south-north distinctions in family violence. Assessing Canada's North generally, rates of police-reported family violence and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV); in turn, the rural south records much higher rates than the southern cities (Statistics Canada, 2024). There is therefore an apparent rate gradation from the most northerly rural and remote communities to the most southerly centres.

Some risks arise from the economic structures typical of RRN communities. Certainly, poverty rates are highest in the large urban centres of the south, in large part because of higher costs of living driven by runaway housing costs (Statistics Canada, 2022). However, BC's RRN communities are also affected by poverty, especially in northern BC's many small and remote Indigenous communities. Poverty is associated with numerous other issues, including lack of safe and affordable housing, lower educational attainment and access, and higher rates of unemployment. Moreover, poverty is not the only risk factor: while resource extraction generates high incomes for many northerners and brings wealth into northern and Indigenous communities, it also produces strains. Resource extraction exaggerates the gender income gap, often requires camp work, and increases household vulnerability to boom-and-bust cycles, all of which may add to the risk of family violence.

Social and cultural differences between urban centres of the south and RRN communities also affect risk. First, RRN communities are more likely than southern urban centres to be primarily Indigenous or to contain a high proportion of Indigenous people. This means that racism, discrimination, and other legacies of colonialism have a disproportionate collective impact in RRN areas. Such legacies increase the likelihood of violence; at the same time, stereotypes, biases, and cultural insensitivity in service provision produce distrust and discourage Indigenous people from seeking help.

Attitudes and beliefs prevalent in RRN areas may increase family violence. Such attitudinal features include victim-blaming and adherence to traditional or patriarchal gender roles (Kohtala & Jaffe & Chiodo, 2025). Conservatism and the high value placed on self-reliance in RRN communities inhibit help-seeking by both perpetrators and victims of family violence and present barriers to accessing services. The very intimacy of tight-knit RRN communities where "everyone knows everyone" also hinders access, since those seeking services may fear loss of privacy, anonymity, and/or confidentiality.

Finally, RRN livelihoods and lifeways present additional risks and barriers. For example, firearms are more prevalent in RRN communities where people rely on or participate in hunting, presenting heightened risk for perpetration of femicide. Gun-perpetrated femicide rates are much higher in RRN communities (Nonomura & Baker). RRN households, particularly farming households, may be widely separated from neighbours who can observe or intervene in violent incidents, and social isolation can be a particularly acute problem for farm women (Wendt & Hornosty 2010). Responsibility to care for and protect domestic animals (whether farm animals or companions) is an additional barrier to help-seeking for victims of family violence in RRN communities. Victims may be unwilling to expose animals to the risk of harm from an angry perpetrator. At the same time, they are often unable to transport animals, access shelters that accept animals, or otherwise incorporate animals into a safety plan. Safety planning is also hindered by lack of robust social support networks, distance from policing services, and lack of specialized mental health services, which may result in victim-blaming or minimizing of abuse ((Kohtala & Jaffe & Chiodo, 2025).

Rate disparities in family violence across regions and the reasons for higher family violence rates in RRN

communities are complex and poorly understood. However, some key features of RRN communities likely contribute to the violence itself while also presenting barriers to addressing it.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SERVICES IN RRN COMMUNITIES

A key barrier to accessing services in RRN communities is isolation, a complex mixture of both human and geographic characteristics. On the geographic side of the ledger, BC's rugged terrain makes transportation difficult and sometimes impossible. BC north of Williams Lake is therefore served by two highways: 97 (North-South) and 16 (East-West). Beyond these highways, many remote communities and Indigenous reserves rely on unpaved or forest service roads. Even when passable, these routes may be challenging to travel, since they are often radio-controlled and used for active logging. Many roads may be impassable in certain seasons or unploughed in winter. Increasing wildfire activity also renders roads dangerous or impassable in the fire season. Some communities are totally or seasonally reliant on air transportation.

Even in areas served by the highways, transportation remains a major barrier. For many RRN communities, particularly in the winter months, unsafe road conditions, inclement weather, lack of cellular coverage, and limited daylight contribute to dangerous driving conditions (Hrymak, 2022). Poor road maintenance, extremely long distances, and heavy hauling traffic make northern and remote highways dangerous for drivers even in the summer. Travelling in rural and remote communities also includes safety implications for survivors of violence. The significant distances that those seeking services must travel often involve ferry rides and the need for overnight accommodations, all contributing to multiple barriers to service access. The rigours of northern roads also demand higher quality vehicles, thus imposing additional economic barriers to car ownership.

Transit does not fill the gap. Indeed, public transportation is a longstanding challenge in much of British Columbia, exacerbated by the withdrawal of Greyhound Bus Lines from BC service in 2017. Hitchhiking has long filled the service gap, but also presents many risks, which were highlighted in the Highway of Tears Symposium held in Prince George in 2006 (*Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report: A Collective Voice for the Victims Who Have Been Silenced*, 2006). New BC Bus services have been implemented since 2018 but remain infrequent and inadequate to meet regional needs. Transportation issues affect both risk of victimization (e.g., inability to leave a risky situation, dependency upon unsafe ride providers) and barriers to accessing services. These risks are further compounded by gender differences such as women's lower rates of vehicle ownership (BC Society of Transition Houses 2021). Unreliable cell phone service not only makes transportation riskier, but also limits safety planning.

Service provision is a constant challenge in RRN communities. Service providers themselves are often overwhelmed by local need, and they experience isolation from communities of practice. Often, the extent and nature of services in one community may be unknown to people in another. This finding catalyzed Northern FIRE to convene conferences and produce a resource guide for people fleeing violence in Northern BC. The guide provides a "one-stop" compendium of shelters and other services throughout the region. There are more shelters across RRN communities than was the case decades ago, but these shelters are overcrowded and underfunded. In addition, RRN victims often feel acutely vulnerable in shelters because it is impossible to hide their location in a small community. Overall, then, services in RRN communities remain insufficient.

Other specialized services are often found far from home. The concentration of specialized services in larger urban centres, coupled with often-vast distances, hinders access for those experiencing family violence. In northern British Columbia, many services are clustered in Prince George, hundreds of kilometers from the small communities of the region. Seeking services in Prince George is often impossible for economic and practical

reasons, and the city itself is a place of vulnerability for service-seekers. Often those who arrive seeking services are exposed to further risks, including housing precarity and threats from criminal networks, such as gangs, while they access services in Prince George.

All of the above risks and barriers interact in distinctive ways in different RRN environments, and no two RRN communities are alike. Research about the RRN context reveals concerning barriers for those accessing services. In a nationwide study involving survivors of extreme family violence, Kohtala et al. (2023) identified the following key barriers: patriarchal attitudes, victim blaming, geographical challenges, confidentiality and privacy concerns, and distrust in institutions. Whether in rural Nova Scotia or northern British Columbia, a remarkably consistent list emerges. This is hopeful news, since promising practices can thus be identified not only from British Columbia, but also from national and international projects in RRN communities.

LEGAL SERVICES: ACCESS IN RRN COMMUNITIES

Many RRN communities lack a permanent courthouse and rely on circuit courts, which travel to the community, sometimes only a handful of times per year. Other communities lack circuit courts, requiring litigants to travel long distances to attend court. The lack of transportation is thus a major barrier for people in rural and remote communities who need to attend court in person. As noted above, transportation is not only a barrier in itself, but imposes additional economic, housing, and safety barriers for those who must travel to seek court services.

The lack of family lawyers in BC constitutes a major issue for legal service provision throughout British Columbia, and particularly in RRN communities. Clients struggling with complex legal issues, especially in cases involving family violence, experience heightened stress when they are unrepresented. Family lawyers, particularly those with expertise in understanding family violence and who are willing to contextualize it for the courts, are in short supply for litigants (Law & Melnyk, 2024). Another problem is that the court system is complicated, unsafe, and intimidating, making it necessary to have a lawyer's advice and representation to navigate the process successfully. As a result, many of the practical solutions recommended in this report are strategies to compensate for the lack of family lawyers in RRN communities.

VIRTUAL PROVISION OF LEGAL SERVICES: A PROMISING PRACTICE

The potential of virtual service provision was recognized even before the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. In New Brunswick, for example, the downloadable EVO app (iOS and Android), launched in 2019, assists women living with IPV with creating safety plans and encourages them to reach out for services and support. (Users are cautioned about the risks of downloading the app to a non-private device) (Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick, 2019). Similarly, a team led by Western University's Marilyn Ford-Gilboe developed iCAN Plan 4 Safety (iCAN), an "interactive, online health and safety resource" available to assist women across Canada with safety planning. Evaluation of the tool found that it offered promise, particularly for certain groups of women (Ford-Gilboe & Varcoe & Scott-Storey, 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, lawyers could use Court Services Online (CSO) to electronically access their client's BC Supreme Court family court records and submit court documents for filing. However, this online platform did not grant access to all family law documents and did not include family law court records filed with the BC Provincial Court.

Before the pandemic, electronic access or filing family law court documents within BC Provincial Court registries was not available. To access court records, counsel or litigants had to physically visit the courthouse registry to

review the file. At the onset of the pandemic, the BC Provincial Court allowed electronic submission of the court documents through email, which was much welcomed by the legal profession.

The pandemic increased interest in virtual service provision, and the extension of services during 2020 and beyond has highlighted how technology can help provide services for those experiencing family violence. With the introduction of the Access to Court Materials (ACM) platform in 2023, all BC lawyers can now access BC Provincial Court family law records, without the need to travel or wait in line at court registries. This advancement has notably improved unbundled legal services. For some clients, having a complete set of their court records is a significant barrier, and the ability to access all filed court documents and orders is immensely beneficial for both clients and their counsel. Other clients may lack access to basic office equipment like scanners. The ability to access court documents online enables counsel to view them efficiently and provide substantive legal advice.

As the above suggests, and as discussed below, virtual service provision is a promising practice. However, virtual services are not a panacea for the difficulties facing family violence victims in RRN communities and should not be viewed as a sole solution to service disparities between RRN and other BC communities. In-person legal services remain important because face-to-face meetings between lawyers and clients offer significant benefits, including developing trust and facilitating practical tasks like signing documents. However, for many residents in rural and remote BC, in-person services are not a reality and can create barriers, burdens, and stressors, when considering factors such as travel expenses, caregiving responsibilities and employment obligations.

While there are meaningful distinctions between RRN and urban communities, it is often unhelpful to categorize areas of BC as simply “urban” or “rural”. Through the delivery of virtual legal services to clients, Rise learned that this binary distinction fails to capture the unique characteristics and regional differences of many communities. Those living and working in rural and remote communities of BC know that resources and needs are not the same for every person or every community. Foundational factors such as the local economy, physical environment, transit routes, and even proximity to a courthouse play a significant role in an individuals’ ability to access legal remedies for their family law issues. These issues are discussed further in Rise’s 2024 report (Law & Melnyk, 2024) and are summarized here. The report and this learning brief reflect the input of support workers from many regions in BC whose insights have helped shape our recommendations for systemic change.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY

1. Further collaborative efforts between the government, the Law Society of BC, Legal Aid BC, and the BC court systems

Successful virtual and online legal service provision requires a coordinated effort between many different organizations and branches of government. These entities demonstrated effective collaboration during the pandemic to ensure that the legal system remained available to court users. The onset of the pandemic required a prompt and coordinated response involving the government, the Law Society of BC, all levels of the BC courts, and Legal Aid BC to ensure that courts remained open. This allowed many lawyers to adapt to the situation and offer virtual services, taking advantage of remote court appearances, electronic filing, and accessing court records online.

By providing virtual legal services, lawyers could expand their reach beyond the traditional geographic boundaries, minimizing the challenges and costs associated with travel. The reality is that there are significantly more lawyers in urban centers than in rural communities, and virtual legal services can enable urban lawyers to help narrow the gap in access to justice. We can alleviate these challenges by leveraging technology and adapting our existing legal practices to routinely include remote court appearances, electronic filing, and accessing court records online. To achieve these goals, we require a coordinated effort to increase accessibility for those who need it most and continued collaboration could improve accessibility within the family court system post-pandemic.

2. Enhance collaboration between lawyers and support workers

A collaborative approach can help survivors with safety issues and provide them with a better understanding of how the family law system intersects with their other essential needs, such as housing, childcare, and finances.

Many survivors are not engaging in family court even if they have financial entitlements under the law, including child support, spousal support, or family property. It is common for survivors to face an escalation of violence after separation or when they assert their rights by using the legal system, which creates safety concerns as they navigate the legal system. Many survivors do not have the resources to fully engage with the legal system and many are forced to stay in abusive relationships (Law & Melnyk, 2024). It requires a multifaceted team to support survivors, including lawyers and support workers collaborating to meet the needs of their mutual client. Through cross-sector collaboration, the client is better positioned to follow family law proceedings through to conclusion.

Effective collaboration can range from formalized partnerships to casual outreach. The Virtual Legal Clinic (VLC) at Rise is an example of a formalized relationship. The VLC uses a community partner model to encourage support workers to accompany their clients to all legal appointments with the lawyer providing summary advice. This allows the lawyer and the support worker to collaborate in prioritizing legal tasks and provide wrap-around supports for the client. When lawyers and support workers collaborate regularly, they learn about each other's abilities to address the needs of a mutual client. On the other end of the collaboration spectrum, casual outreach can be as straightforward as a lawyer contacting a local community organization and seeking a recommendation for someone to support a client with non-legal needs. Both approaches, and everything in between, are effective because two different supports are working together with a client at the center.

The feedback provided by support workers from across BC identified that clients walk away from financial entitlements for four main reasons:

- 1.** The family law system is not built to handle family violence so clients do not trust that it can help.
- 2.** Many clients struggle to meet basic needs which precludes them from being able to take on legal battles.
- 3.** Abusive opposing parties engage in lengthy litigation, making it hard for clients to continue.
- 4.** Many survivors lack access to legal representation (Law & Melnyk, 2024).

Involving support workers in legal work can help address some of these issues as support workers often have specialized knowledge of family violence that many legal professionals lack. They can provide referrals to wrap around supports, build trust with clients, and form longer-term relationships. Even when trauma-informed lawyers are providing excellent support to their clients, it may not be the most efficient use of their expertise to handle tasks that support workers are better equipped to address. The work of lawyers and support workers should be seen as complementary by taking the best from both roles to focus on better outcomes for clients.

3. Establish one centralized, online platform for filing court documents and accessing court records

Given the variety of adaptations used during the pandemic and some that remain post-pandemic, court users would benefit if they could access court documents from a centralized online platform. Currently, Court Services Online is a platform used to access court records and documents at the BC Supreme Court level and the Access to Court Materials platform offers the equivalent service for the BC Provincial Court level. A centralized system combining both could allow court users to select a level of court and their applicable courthouse registry while maintaining the efficiency that is currently provided through both platforms. A centralized platform would improve accessibility and ease of navigation for all court users including lawyers and clients alike.

4. Provide court users with a choice on the method of court appearance

Building in a choice for court users to appear in court, instead of a default method of appearance, will save the courts' resources and alleviate stress for court users. The pandemic has demonstrated that remote court appearance can be effective for certain court proceedings, but in some circumstances in-person appearances would have been more appropriate. Additionally, the option for remote court appearance is critical for small communities with only circuit courts or no courts at all.

The requirement to submit separate court applications to appear through alternative means can be avoided by incorporating an option in all court forms for applications and responses where parties or their counsel can select their preferred method of appearance, whether in-person or remotely. This inclusive approach not only streamlines the process but also serves to inform unrepresented litigants about the available options for attending court, alleviating concerns, and negating the necessity for additional applications. Choosing a preferred method of appearance empowers survivors and aligns with a trauma-informed approach, providing crucial support to individuals navigating the challenges of a stressful or unsafe legal system (Hrymak 2022).

5. Increase funding for support workers to help clients in family court

Both prior to and following court proceedings, a support worker can significantly impact a survivor's ability to engage in court processes, find safe waiting spaces in the courthouse, and enhance their sense of security in an intimidating environment. During court proceedings, support workers can act as "support persons" to provide emotional and practical support including taking notes, providing quiet reminders to the client, and organizing documents (Supreme Court of British Columbia & Provincial Court of British Columbia, 2022).

Support workers have shared that they do not have a secure and consistent role to play in court support (Law & Melnyk, 2024). This is a disappointing observation given the formal role of support persons created by the courts. Both BC Supreme Court and BC Provincial Court include guidelines for the use of a support person in family proceedings (Law & Melnyk, 2024). It is clear we cannot create court-support capacity simply by encouraging existing community-based workers to take on additional work. Instead, the provincial government must provide additional funding to increase the number of family court support workers, expand their scope of work and increase specialized training opportunities for them to increase their skill in court settings.

Additionally, it would be helpful if both the BC Supreme Court and Provincial Court amended their guidelines to explicitly indicate that litigants are not required to seek permission from the opposing party or their counsel for a support person to be present, highlighting that the decision will be made by the presiding judge or associate judge.

6. Increase the number of Commissioners for Taking Affidavits

Affidavits are an important form of evidence in many court proceedings. In communities with lawyers and multiple court registries, there are numerous options for the commission of affidavits. However, affidavits commissioned by lawyers, notary publics, and Supreme Court registry clerks often entail a fee. In communities where there are few or no law offices, and no court registry, finding someone to commission an affidavit can be difficult.

The introduction of virtual commissioning of affidavits was a temporary measure to meet physical distancing requirements during the pandemic, rather than a measure specifically designed to meet the needs of individuals residing in rural and remote communities. Instead of continuing with a virtual commissioning process, it makes sense to increase the number of Commissioners for Taking Affidavits to increase access to this service in more communities across the province. Local support workers should seek appointments as Commissioners for Taking Affidavits, enabling them to assist their clients with these documents. Most community organizations will have access to photocopiers, scanners, printers, and computers to ensure that affidavits are in the proper format before filing via email or through Court Services Online and could offer the service without charge. Increasing the number of commissioners across the province is a small but significant step in reducing barriers to the legal system, especially for unrepresented litigants.

7. Minimize the turnover of family law advocates and support workers

The high turnover of legal advocates and support workers, particularly those providing family law supports, is a concern across the province. Turnover negatively impacts the continuity of care for clients, decreases the effectiveness of referrals, and limits the client's ability to participate in the legal system. Learning how to navigate the family law system requires a significant investment of time and training on the part of support workers. Experience and knowledge are key to assisting clients in this complex field.

When it comes to staff shortages, ironically, the number of vacancies exacerbates turnover as pressure intensifies on those who are already in place. When frontline workers are employed only part-time, they scramble to combine multiple contracts to create a full-time position (Law & Melnyk, 2024). When a worker moves to a different organization offering a higher wage it does nothing to increase the overall capacity of the sector. Further, when a support worker stretches outside their scope or works unpaid hours to compensate for lack of staff, it does not help with capacity issues. All of these compensation techniques take a toll on the workers and perpetuate turnover because the employees are working in a resource deficit. Family law advocates work better when they have access to a supervising lawyer and a community of support, rather than working in isolation. Support workers with more stability in their roles credited the dedication of their organization's executive directors with finding funding and providing mentorship (Law & Melnyk, 2024).

Many people gravitate to anti-violence work because they aspire to make a meaningful difference through their careers. Increased funding, longer funding cycles, and more flexible funding models would significantly alleviate staffing shortages for this important work to continue.

8. Allocate more funding to expand family law advocacy services

Due to the shortage of lawyers in communities offering this assistance, unrepresented litigants often turn to family law advocates for support, but the demand exceeds the capacity of existing advocates in BC. Family Law Advocates funded by the Law Foundation of BC are highly trained in legal process, legal resources, and additional legal services to meet their clients' needs. However, with only 26 Family Law Advocate positions across the province, there are simply not enough to meet the demand. As of October 2023, there were a total of 13 family law advocates serving Greater Vancouver, the Fraser Valley and Victoria regions with another 13 family law advocates to cover the rest of the province. While Family Law Advocates could offer virtual services to reach a greater area, they are already operating at full capacity due to the demand in their immediate communities.

Providing Family Law Advocate services through virtual platforms could greatly help communities with smaller populations that struggle to justify a full-time, in-person position. Creating more virtual roles also addresses issues with finding suitable candidates and host agencies for this specialized role. From a practical standpoint, a virtual role can respond better to the intermittent demands for service in rural communities. A Family Law Advocate providing virtual services is better positioned to accommodate a client's schedule, transportation challenges, and childcare needs. Wait times can also be significantly reduced because virtual services can respond promptly to unpredictable demands anywhere in the province.

The intention behind virtual advocacy services is not to replace in-person services, but rather to augment the successful model of family law advocacy by expanding the current geographical reach. We propose that new Family Law Advocates should be placed alongside existing Family Law Advocates to foster collaboration, encourage mentorship, and mitigate isolation. This would grow the capacity of legal advocacy services, allowing advocates to provide both virtual services to increase geographical reach alongside in-person services to meet local demand.

9. Invest in reliable cellular networks and internet services to improve safety and increase access to legal supports.

As noted above, while most Canadians have access to reliable cellular and internet service, individuals without access face significant challenges in connecting with support services. Those experiencing violence and residing in rural and remote areas of BC are often unable to call for help or connect with virtual essential services due to the lack of cellular and internet coverage across the province.

Support workers in rural and remote communities across the province have highlighted a significant lack of connectivity for their clients in rural areas (Law & Melnyk, 2024). This lack of connectivity directly translated into safety concerns for clients. The lifeline of communication for women and gender-diverse individuals experiencing violence now relies on cellphones with mobile data plans and internet connections, assuming adequate upload and download speeds are available.

Finding solutions to this problem is challenging. Cell phone providers are large, profit-oriented companies with responsibilities to shareholders, making it exceedingly difficult to exert influence on them. The desperate lack of safety is insufficient to drive change, primarily because the investment required by these companies to build a network reaching every individual in the province is so costly. That said, a notable example of success involving political will combined with private sector collaboration is the expansion of cellular service along Highway 16, also known as the Highway of Tears. The public demand for safety prompted a government response, resulting in the Rogers Communications project to extend coverage along 252 kilometers of the highway. When this investment is added to existing connectivity from other providers, there will be continuous cellular coverage along the entire route (British Columbia, Ministry of Citizens' Services, 2022). Survivors of family violence cannot achieve this kind of connectivity goal on their own, and support workers, along with the provincial government, cannot achieve results independently either. Collaboration among all participants is crucial to achieving universal connectivity that fosters safety and offers people opportunities for support, as well as participation in online legal proceedings.

CONCLUSION

Although implementing band-aid solutions is necessary in the short term, we need to maintain our focus on the long-term goal, an accessible family law system for all individuals. In addition to the nine recommendations above, we recommend longer-term changes, including centralized hubs for service delivery in RRN communities and holistic and wraparound service provision. We also recommend culturally safe and appropriate services and a specific service delivery framework that can ameliorate the particular challenges faced by Indigenous women (BC Association of Friendship Centres, 2023). There are ample existing calls to action and recommendations relating to Indigenous women, family violence, and access to services but implementing these recommendations now should be an urgent priority (BC Association of Friendship Centres, 2023).

Beyond the money that goes into guides and tools for unrepresented litigants, we need to find a way for everyone who wants legal representation to access their own lawyer. Looking beyond the mitigation of power imbalances by relying on more support workers to provide help in court, we need to change the court processes themselves to be more robust for survivors of violence. Through building the collaborative models proposed in this report, we can build safety into legal processes and courthouses and move decisively toward addressing the situation of those facing family violence in RRN communities.

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